

Claim Listing

Claims 1-7 and 9-50 are pending. Claim 8 has been canceled; claims 1, 6, 7, 9, 24-35, 40, 44, and 47 have been amended; new claim 50 has been added.

1. (Currently amended) In a network-based e-commerce environment, including a plurality of network-connected e-commerce sites accessible by a plurality of network-connected users, a method of tracking selected referrals, comprising:

enrolling at least two e-commerce sites in a merchant network;

providing a first navigational link that allows network-connected users to reach a first one of the e-commerce sites that have enrolled in said merchant network;

providing a second navigational link that allows network-connected users to navigate from said first one of said e-commerce sites to a second one of the e-commerce sites that have enrolled in said merchant network; and,

compensating entities associated with said first and second navigational links ~~when~~ after a network-connected user utilizes said first navigational link to reach said first e-commerce site, utilizes said second navigational link to reach said second e-commerce site and completes a commercial transaction at said second e-commerce site.

2. (Original) In a network-based e-commerce environment, a method of tracking selected referrals, as defined in claim 1, wherein:

compensating entities associated with said first and second navigational links comprises splitting a referral commission associated with said commercial transaction between said entities associated with said first and second navigational links.

3. (Original) In a network-based e-commerce environment, a method of tracking selected referrals, as defined in claim 1, wherein:

compensating entities associated with said first and second navigational links comprises assigning equal portions of a referral commission associated with said commercial transaction to each of said entities associated with said first and second navigational links.

4. (Original) In a network-based e-commerce environment, a method of tracking selected referrals, as defined in claim 1, wherein:

compensating entities associated with said first and second navigational links comprises assigning a majority portion of a referral commission associated with said commercial transaction to said entity associated with said first navigational link, and assigning a minority portion of said referral commission to said entity associated with said second navigational link.

5. (Original) In a network-based e-commerce environment, a method of tracking selected referrals, as defined in claim 1, to wherein:

compensating entities associated with said first and second navigational links comprises assigning a minority portion of a referral commission associated with said commercial transaction to said entity is associated with said first navigational link, and assigning a majority portion of said referral commission to said entity associated with said second navigational link.

6. (Currently amended) In a network-based e-commerce environment, a method of tracking selected referrals, as defined in claim 1, further comprising:

compensating only an entity associated with said first navigational link ~~when~~ after a network-connected user utilizes said first navigational link to reach said first e-commerce site and completes a commercial transaction at said first e-commerce site.

7. (Currently amended) In a network-based e-commerce environment, a method of tracking selected referrals, as defined in claim 6, further comprising:

compensating only an entity associated with said second navigational link ~~when~~ after a network-connected user utilizes said second navigational link to reach said second e-commerce site and completes a commercial transaction at said second e-commerce site.

8. (Canceled)

9. (Currently amended) In a network-based e-commerce environment, a method of tracking selected referrals, as defined in claim 1, further comprising:

providing a third navigational link that allows network-connected users to navigate from said second one of said e-commerce sites to a third one of the e-commerce sites that have enrolled in said merchant network; and,

compensating entities associated with said first, second and third navigational links ~~when~~ after a network connected user utilizes said first navigational link to reach said first e-commerce site, utilizes said second navigational link to reach said second e-commerce site, utilizes said third navigational link to reach said third e-commerce site and completes a commercial transaction at said third e-commerce site.

10. (Original) In a network-based e-commerce environment, a method of tracking selected referrals, as defined in claim 9, wherein:

compensating entities associated with said first, second and third navigational links comprises assigning equal portions of a referral commission associated with said commercial transaction completed at said third e-commerce site to each of said entities associated with said first, second and third navigational links.

11. (Original) In a network-based e-commerce environment, a method of tracking selected referrals, as defined in claim 9, wherein:

compensating entities associated with said first, second and third navigational links comprises assigning a majority portion of a referral commission associated with said commercial transaction completed at said third e-commerce site to said entities associated with said second and/or third navigational links.

12. (Original) In a network-based e-commerce environment, a method of tracking selected referrals, as defined in claim 9, wherein:

compensating entities associated with said first, second and third navigational links comprises assigning a majority portion of a referral commission associated with said commercial transaction completed at said third e-commerce site to said entity associated with said third navigational link.

13. (Currently amended) A method of compensating sources who refer network-connected users to, and among, a group of e-commerce merchants, said method comprising:

providing a plurality of network-accessible primary referral links configured to direct network-connected users from ~~a source~~ one or more sources outside said group of e-commerce merchants to selected ones of said e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants;

providing a plurality of network-accessible secondary referral links configured to direct network-connected users from e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants to other e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants;

compensating a primary referral source in response to completion of an e-commerce transaction at a first one of the e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, where the user who completed said transaction was referred to said first e-commerce merchant by a referral link provided by said primary referral source;

compensating primary and secondary referral sources in response to completion of an e-commerce transaction at a second one of the e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, where the user who completed said transaction was referred to said secondary referral source by a referral provided by said primary referral source, and said user was referred to said second e-commerce merchant by a referral link provided by said secondary referral source.

14. (Original) A method of compensating sources who refer network-connected users to, and among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as described in claim 13, wherein:

compensating primary and secondary referral sources comprises assigning equal shares of a commission associated with the completion of said e-commerce transaction to said primary and secondary referral sources.

15. (Original) A method of compensating sources who refer network-connected users to, and among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as described in claim 13, wherein:

compensating primary and secondary referral sources comprises assigning a majority portion of a commission associated with the completion of said e-commerce transaction to said primary referral source and assigning a minority portion of said commission to said secondary referral source.

16. (Original) A method of compensating sources who refer network-connected users to, and among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as described in claim 13, wherein:

compensating primary and secondary referral sources comprises assigning a majority portion of a commission associated with the completion of said e-commerce transaction to said secondary referral source and assigning a minority portion of said commission to said primary referral source.

17. (Original) A method of tracking commissions earned by primary referrals to, and secondary referrals among, a group of e-commerce merchants, said method comprising:

providing a plurality of network-accessible primary referral links configured to direct network-connected users from a source outside said group of e-commerce merchants to selected ones of said e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, each of said primary referral links including a primary referral source identifier that identifies the source of said primary referral link;

providing a plurality of network-accessible secondary referral links configured to direct networks connected users from e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants to other e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, each of said secondary referral links including a secondary referral source identifier that identifies the source of said secondary referral link; and,

in response to a network-connected user's engagement of a secondary referral link to navigate from a first e-commerce merchant in said group of e-commerce merchants to second e-commerce merchant in said group of e-commerce merchants, storing primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant.

18. (Original) A method of tracking commissions earned by primary referrals to, and secondary referrals among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as defined in claim 17, wherein:

storing primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant includes embedding primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any

primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant in a navigational link utilized to direct said user to said second e-commerce merchant.

19. (Original) A method of tracking commissions earned by primary referrals to, and secondary referrals among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as defined in claim 17, wherein:

storing primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant includes directing the user from said first e-commerce merchant to said second e-commerce merchant through a clearinghouse server and storing, at said clearinghouse server, primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant.

20. (Original) A method of tracking commissions earned by primary referrals to, and secondary referrals among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as defined in claim 17, wherein:

storing primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant includes sending a message to a clearinghouse server containing the primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant.

21. (Original) A method for permitting an e-commerce merchant, in a group of e-commerce merchants, to earn commissions by referring customers to other merchant(s) in said group of e-commerce merchants, said method comprising:

permitting a user to select product(s) and/or service(s) for purchase at said e-commerce merchant's site;

in response to the user's selection(s) of product(s) and/or service(s), referring said user to another e-commerce merchant in said group of e-commerce merchants;

in response to said user's purchase of product(s) and/or service(s) from said another e-commerce merchant, selectively assigning a commission associated with said purchase as follows:

all of said commission to said e-commerce merchant who referred said user to said another e-commerce merchant, if said e-commerce merchant would not owe commissions to a any referring entity(ies) for purchases made by said user from said e-commerce merchant; or,

if said e-commerce merchant would owe commissions to one or more referring entity(ies) for purchases made by said user from said e-commerce merchant, part of said commission to said e-commerce merchant, and part of said commission to one or more of said one or more referring entity(ies).

22. (Original) A method for permitting an e-commerce merchant to earn commissions by referring customers to other merchant(s), as defined in claim 21, wherein:

assigning part of said commission associated with said purchase to said e-commerce merchant and part of said commission to one or more of said referring entity(ies) comprises assigning a majority of said commission to said e-commerce merchant.

23. (Original) A method for permitting an e-commerce merchant to earn commissions by referring customers to other merchant(s), as defined in claim 21, wherein:

assigning part of said commission associated with said purchase to said e-commerce merchant and part of said commission to one or more of said referring entity(ies) comprises assigning a majority of said commission to one or more of said referring entity(ies).

24. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, comprising:

a network-accessible merchant enrollment processing module configured to enroll e-commerce merchants in a merchant network through an automated, on-line process;

a network-accessible affiliate enrollment processing module configured to enroll affiliates through an automated, on-line process, thereby enabling enrolled affiliates to provide primary referral links to enrolled e-commerce merchants;

a commission processing module, configured to:

assign compensation to an affiliate in response to (i) a network-connected user's use of a primary referral link provided by said affiliate to reach an enrolled e-commerce merchant and (ii) said user's completion of a transaction with said e-commerce merchant;

assign compensation to both an affiliate and an enrolled e-commerce merchant in response to (i) a network-connected users use of a primary referral link provided by said affiliate to reach said enrolled e-commerce merchant, (ii) said user's use of a secondary referral link provided by said e-commerce merchant to reach another enrolled e-commerce merchant and (iii) said user's completion of a transaction with said another e-commerce merchant.

25. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, as defined in claim 24, wherein:

said merchant enrollment processing module includes a merchant identification module that assigns a unique merchant identifier to each newly enrolled merchant.

26. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, as defined in claim 24, wherein:

said merchant enrollment processing module includes a merchant software stub installation module that provides tracking software for installation at enrolled e-commerce merchants.

27. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, as defined in claim 24, wherein:

said affiliate enrollment processing module includes an affiliate identification module that assigns a unique affiliate identifier to each newly enrolled affiliate.

28. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, as defined in claim 27, wherein:

said primary referral links each include an affiliate identifier.

29. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, as defined in claim 24, wherein:

said commission processing module is hosted by a network-connected clearinghouse server, separate from said enrolled e-commerce merchants.

30. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, as defined in claim 29, wherein:

said enrollment processing modules are also hosted by said clearinghouse server.

31. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, as defined in claim 24, wherein:

the commission processing module is further configured to assign compensation to both the affiliate and the enrolled e-commerce merchant by splitting between said affiliate and enrolled merchant a commission equal to that which the affiliate would receive for referring said user directly to said another e-commerce merchant.

32. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, as defined in claim 31, wherein:

said commission processing module is hosted by a network-connected clearinghouse server, separate from any of the affiliates or e-commerce merchants.

33. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, as defined in claim 31, wherein:

said commission splitting assigns equal shares of said split commission to said affiliate and said enrolled e-commerce merchant.

34. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, as defined in claim 31, wherein:

said commission splitting assigns a majority share of said split commission to said affiliate and a minority share of said split commission to said enrolled e-commerce merchant.

35. (Currently amended) A network-based e-commerce ~~environment~~ system, as defined in claim 31, wherein

said commission splitting assigns a minority share of said split commission to said affiliate and a majority share of said split commission to said enrolled e-commerce merchant.

36. (Original) A network-based system for compensating sources who refer network-connected users to, and among, a group of e-commerce merchants, said system comprising:

a plurality of network-accessible primary referral links configured to direct network-connected users from a source outside said group of e-commerce merchants to selected ones of said e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants;

a plurality of network-accessible secondary referral links configured to direct network-connected users from e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants to other e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants;

means for compensating a primary referral source in response to completion of an e-commerce transaction at one of the e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, where the user who completed said transaction was referred to said e-commerce merchant by a referral link provided by said primary referral source; and,

means for compensating primary and secondary referral sources in response to completion of an e-commerce transaction at one of the e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, where the user who completed said transaction was referred to said secondary referral source by a referral provided by said primary referral source, and said user was referred to said e-commerce merchant by a referral link provided by said secondary referral source.

37. (Original) A system for compensating sources who refer network-connected users to, and among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as described in claim 36, wherein:

said means for compensating primary and secondary referral sources includes means for assigning equal shares of a commission associated with the completion of said e-commerce transaction to said primary and secondary referral sources.

38. (Original) A system for compensating sources who refer network-connected users to, and among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as described in claim 36, wherein:

said means for compensating primary and secondary referral sources includes means for assigning a majority portion of a commission associated with the completion of said e-commerce transaction to said primary referral source and assigning a minority portion of said commission to said secondary referral source.

39. (Original) A system for compensating sources who refer network-connected users to, and among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as described in claim 36, wherein:

said means for compensating primary and secondary referral sources includes means for assigning a majority portion of a commission associated with the completion of said e-commerce transaction to said secondary referral source and assigning a minority portion of said commission to said primary referral source.

40. (Currently amended) A system for tracking commissions earned by primary referrals to, and secondary referrals among, a group of e-commerce merchants, said ~~method~~ system comprising:

a plurality of network-accessible primary referral links configured to direct network-connected users from a source outside said group of e-commerce merchants to selected ones of said e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, each of said primary referral links including a primary referral source identifier that identifies the source of said primary referral link;

a plurality of network-accessible secondary referral links configured to direct network-connected users from e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants to other e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, each

of said secondary referral links including a secondary referral source identifier that identifies the source of said secondary referral link; and,

a secondary referral processing module, responsive to a network-connected user's engagement of a secondary referral link to navigate from a first e-commerce merchant in said group of e-commerce merchants to second e-commerce merchant in said group of e-commerce merchants, and configured to store primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant.

41. (Original) A system for tracking commissions earned by primary referrals to, and secondary referrals among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as defined in claim 40, wherein:

said secondary referral processing module embeds primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant in a navigational link utilized to direct said user to said second e-commerce merchant.

42. (Original) A system for tracking commissions earned by primary referrals to, and secondary referrals among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as defined in claim 40, wherein:

said secondary referral processing module directs the user from said first e-commerce merchant to said second e-commerce merchant through a clearinghouse server and stores, at said clearinghouse server, primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant.

43. (Original) A system for tracking commissions earned by primary referrals to, and secondary referrals among, a group of e-commerce merchants, as defined in claim 40, wherein:

said secondary referral processing module sends a message to a clearinghouse server containing the primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any

primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant.

44. (Currently amended) A system for permitting an e-commerce merchant, in a group of e-commerce merchants, to earn commissions by referring customers to other merchant(s) in said group of e-commerce merchants, said ~~method~~ system comprising:

a catalog processing module that allows a user to select product(s) and/or service(s) for purchase at said e-commerce merchant's site;

a secondary referral module, responsive to the user's selection(s) of product(s) and/or service(s), and configured to refer said user to another e-commerce merchant in said group of e-commerce merchants;

a commission processing module, responsive to said user's purchase of product(s) and/or service(s) from said another e-commerce merchant, and configured to selectively assign a commission associated with said purchase as follows:

all of said commission to said e-commerce merchant who referred said user to said another e-commerce merchant, if said e-commerce merchant would not owe commissions to a any referring entity(ies) for purchases made by said user from said e-commerce merchant;
or,

if said e-commerce merchant would owe commissions to one or more referring entity(ies) for purchases made by said user from said e-commerce merchant, part of said commission to said e-commerce merchant, and part of said commission to one or more of said one or more referring entity(ies).

45. (Original) A system for permitting an e-commerce merchant to earn commissions by referring customers to other merchant(s), as defined in claim 44, wherein:

assigning part of said commission associated with said purchase to said e-commerce merchant and part of said commission to one or more of said referring entity(ies) comprises assigning a majority of said commission to said e-commerce merchant.

46. (Original) A system for permitting an e-commerce merchant to earn commissions by referring customers to other merchant(s), as defined in claim 44, wherein:

assigning part of said commission associated with said purchase to said e-commerce merchant and part of said commission to one or more of said referring entity(ies) comprises assigning a majority of said commission to one or more of said referring entity(ies).

47. (Currently amended) Articles-of-manufacture for use in a network-based e-commerce environment which includes a merchant network of at least two network-connected e-commerce merchants, said articles-of-manufacture comprising computer-readable media containing instructions which, when executed, cause one or more network-connected computers to:

provide a first navigational link that allows network-connected users to reach a first one of the e-commerce sites in said merchant network;

provide a second navigational link that allows network-connected users to navigate from said first one of said e-commerce sites to a second one of the e-commerce sites in said merchant network; and,

compensate entities associated with said first and second navigational links ~~when~~ after a network-connected user utilizes said first navigational link to reach said first e-commerce site, utilizes said second navigational link to reach said second e-commerce site and completes a commercial transaction at said second e-commerce site.

48. (Original) Articles-of-manufacture for use in a network-based e-commerce environment which includes a group of at least two network-connected e-commerce merchants, said articles of manufacture comprising computer-readable media containing instructions which, when executed, cause one or more network-connected computers to:

provide a plurality of network-accessible primary referral links configured to direct network-connected users from a source outside said group of e-commerce merchants to selected ones of said e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, each of said primary referral links including a primary referral source identifier that identifies the source of said primary referral link;

provide a plurality of network-accessible secondary referral links configured to direct network connected users from e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants to other e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, each of said secondary referral links including a secondary referral source identifier that identifies the source of said secondary referral link; and,

in response to a network-connected user's engagement of a secondary referral link to navigate from a first e-commerce merchant in said group of e-commerce merchants to second e-commerce merchant in said group of e-commerce merchants, storing primary and secondary source identifiers associated with any primary and secondary referral links utilized by said user to reach said first e-commerce merchant.

49. (Original) Articles-of-manufacture for use in a network-based e-commerce environment which includes a group of at least two network-connected e-commerce merchants, said articles of manufacture comprising computer-readable media containing instructions which, when executed, cause one or more network-connected computers to:

provide a plurality of network-accessible primary referral links configured to direct network-connected users from a source outside said group of e-commerce merchants to selected ones of said e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants;

provide a plurality of network-accessible secondary referral links configured to direct network-connected users from e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants to other e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants;

compensate a primary referral source in response to completion of an e-commerce transaction at one of the e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, where the user who completed said transaction was referred to said e-commerce merchant by a referral link provided by said primary referral source; and,

compensate primary and secondary referral sources in response to completion of an e-commerce transaction at one of the e-commerce merchants in said group of e-commerce merchants, where the user who completed said transaction was referred to said

secondary referral source by a referral provided by said primary referral source, and said user was referred to said e-commerce merchant by a referral link provided by said secondary referral source.

50. (New) In a network-based e-commerce environment, including a plurality of network-connected e-commerce sites accessible by a plurality of network-connected users, a method of tracking selected referrals, comprising:

enrolling at least two e-commerce sites in a merchant network;

providing a first navigational link that allows network-connected users to reach a first one of the e-commerce sites that have enrolled in said merchant network;

providing a second navigational link that allows network-connected users to navigate from said first one of said e-commerce sites to a second one of the e-commerce sites that have enrolled in said merchant network; and,

compensating only an entity associated with said second navigational link after a network-connected user utilizes said second navigational link to reach said second e-commerce site and completes a commercial transaction at said second e-commerce site.